Skill Development Activity:
IMPROVING SPATIAL STRUCTURING
Classifier Use - English Texts

Classifiers fall into a variety of classes. According to the Signing Naturally (2014) curriculum, published by Dawn Sign Press, there are eight.

1. Semantic Classifier

    Semantic classifiers are proforms that function as "pronoun" that replaces a noun (or as noun and verb combined). Some examples of semantic classifiers are: cl-1 (e.g. a person), cl-2 (e.g. two persons), cl-2-upsidedown (a standing person), cl-2bent (e.g. an animal), etc.

2. Descriptive Classifier

    Descriptive classifiers are used to describe shape, size, texture, or a pattern of a noun. Examples include stripes on a shirt, width or narrowness of a corridor, shape, length and thickness of a mustache, surface of a road that is under repair, etc.

3. Instrument Classifier

    The handshapes of instrument classifiers describe how an object is handled. Examples include using a tool, holding a book, cutting with a knife, pushing a button, buttoning a shirt, lifting a jar lid, pulling a nail, removing a book from a shelf, etc.

4. Element Classifiers

    These classifiers use both the handshapes and movements to describe the property and movement of the elements of fire, water, and air. Examples could include showing a fire raging across a vast amount of land or engulfing an entire house.

5. Locative Classifier

    Two types of locative classifiers are 1) location and 2) pathline.

    Locative classifier is used to indicate a location of something, or the position relative to another. It is also used as a pathline of the object and its movement and/or distance. For example, the relationship of a house to the garage would show location, and the path from the opening of the garage door to the backdoor of the house would show the pathline. Or, if a particular book is located on the third shelf down, fifth book over from the left, of a five-shelf bookcase, the path from the bookcase top shelf down to the third shelf, and over from the left to the right by five books to show the specific location of the book would be the pathway.

6. Body Classifier

    Body classifier uses a direct contact with most of the upper frontal part of the body to refer to a part of the body. For example, hands "holding a person", tapping on a person's back or shoulder, or, a person nodding their head to show someone nodding their head.

7. Body Part Classifier

Body part classifier is a symbol that refers to a part of the body beyond the frame of the signing area -- e.g. legs, back, feet, etc. For example, you utter the ASL word #foot and then use its classifier (e.g. the passive hand) to represent the foot. Or, you would use an CL-S handshape to represent a head shaking no. Or, you would use the CL-index finger of both hands, crossed, to represent legs crossed.

8. Plural Classifier

Plural classifier is a plural symbol of a noun or subject. Some examples are a) CL-open-hand, horizontal, palm down for "many birds flying in the sky" or b) CL-horizontal 3-handshape representing a car parked in a lot, held, while the non-dominant hand replicates and moves that handshape across the lot, would show multiple cars parked in the lot.

In this guide, you will analyze a series of short English texts to determine how you can use classifier constructs to better convey spatial structuring as part of translating messages from English into ASL. In another guide, you will focus on translating ASL classifier constructs into spoken English messages.

Exercise A: Let's practice the process you are being asked to apply. Consider the following English text, taken from The Random House Book of 1001 Questions and Answers, by Bridget and Neil Ardley, 1989, Random House, NY.

Q. Why count calories?

A. If you are watching your weight, you probably worry about calories…the number of calories you eat, or drink for that matter. Well, one thing you might consider when choosing drinks is that twelve ounces of beer has more calories than twelve ounces of soda. However, I doubt either one will help your diet!!

Where are opportunities to use classifiers in this text? The topic of this text is *counting calories*. ASL typically follows a topic-comment structure. So, what is the core comment or point[s] about calories made in this text and what classifiers might be used to convey those points? The starting place is to think about this text in terms of a real-world orientation. For example, how is it that we as consumers know how many calories there are in a product? What does our process of worrying about or counting calories "look like" in the real-world?

Perhaps we are checking out the label on a product to find out the calories - comparing product against product to determine which has the least calories, salt or other ingredients. Or, maybe we are using some calorie-calculating app on our iPhone or computer to do the same thing. With this in mind, what classifiers might be used? How do we go about 'choosing drinks'? We might do it in a grocery store when we are buying our groceries or check out the app when ordering from a menu. And, why do we count calories? Because monitoring our weight is an important part of healthy living.

So, here are some places we might use classifiers in translating this text.

1. Instrument CL:C handshape could be used to show us holding a can off a shelf in a grocery store. We could elaborate on this by holding cans in each hand for comparison, or by picking up one can, reading the label, putting it back on the shelf, picking up another can/different brand, etc. We could identify one can as beer and one as soda.

2. Descriptive CL:G handshape could be used to show the front section that has the brand logo/name and number of ounces of liquid, then turn the can to the back to check the label on the can with the calorie information.

3. Descriptive CL:open-B handshape to show changing size of a torso to indicate fluctuating weight and/or the desire to keep the torso lean/slim for the section on watching weight.

Part of the application of these classifiers is the use of *constructed action* to depict a person/self hypothetically engaged in shopping and comparing labels. Depiction is another important aspect of incorporating a real-life, visual-spatial orientation to information and provides for a natural application of classifiers as part of the process.

With these possibilities in mind, develop a translation of the text, practice it, tape it, share it with a mentor and/or peers for feedback, and re-do as the feedback warrants, until you have a translation that you feel is a good illustration of the meaning of the text and incorporates several different classifier constructs that convey the information in a visual-spatial manner.

You can take the process one step further by having someone who is unfamiliar with the original text to back-translate the text into English and then compare that translation to the original text. This will help you to gauge how effective you were in preserving the semantic intent of the text.

Exercise B: You will repeat the analysis process with additional English texts that you will translate into ASL. Here are the steps you will apply, followed by a series of short, but robust English texts for you to work with.

Step 1. Analyze the text to determine how to approach the translation of the text using a real-world visual-spatial orientation. For example, if the text focuses on the location and description of something, is the size and shape something that will require you to alternate from close-up [like a rain gauge] to long-shot orientation [like the planets or the Grand Canyon], or will it require one perspective only?

Step 2. Determine where there are opportunities to use classifier constructs. If you have multiple options for a certain portion of the message, consider which seems more natural and authentic in terms of a real-world orientation. Identify the class of classifiers that you will use - it is common to use multiple classes within a text.

Step 3. Will the use of the classifiers involve the use of construction action or other elements of depiction? If so, where and how do you see it being incorporated?

Step 4. Complete a translation of the text in its entirety, giving particular attention to your use of classifiers as part of your spatial structuring.

Step 5. When you feel you have a fairly solid translation, record yourself generating it into ASL.

Step 6. Conduct a self-assessment. Were you successful in applying the classifier constructions you intended? What would you do differently to make it more effective? Share the recording with a mentor and/or peers for further feedback.

Step 7. Incorporating your own self-assessment and feedback from your mentor and/or peers, re-do your translation and filming of it.

Step 8. If time permits, give the final translation in ASL to a peer unfamiliar with the text and your translation and have them back-translate it into English. How representative is the back-translation of the original English text? How might you improve your translation further to make it more equivalent?

Repeat this process with other texts. With regular practice, review, and revision, this strategy will strengthen your ability to visualize English texts in a more visual-spatial manner.

The following texts are taken from The Random House Book of 1001 Questions and Answers, by Bridget and Neil Ardley, 1989, Random House, NY and Learn to Listen, Listen to Learn, by Roni S. Lebauer, 1988 Princeton-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

Q: How big is the Moon?

A: The moon is 2,155 miles across - about the same width as Australia. Its total area is less than four times the size of Europe.

Q: How is rainfall measured?

A: An instrument called a rain gauge is placed outside in the rain to measure how much rain falls. The depth of water that collects in the rain gauge is measured to find the rainfall, and it is measured in inches.

Q: Why can stars only be seen at night?

A: Stars cannot be seen during the day because the Sun is so bright. Its light spreads out over the sky, making it appear blue. The stars are still there in the sky, but our eyes adjust to the bright blue of the sky and cannot make out the fainter stars. At dawn and dusk, when the sunlight is pale, the brightest stars and planets can be seen.

Q: What is a family of animals?

A: When animal experts talk about a family of animals, they do not mean only parents and young. Different animals that have similar bodies are said to be in the same family. For example, wild cats, such as lions, tigers and leopards, and pet cats, all belong to the cat family.

Q: What happens in an earthquake?

A: In an earthquake, the ground suddenly begins to shake. The shaking lasts for a few seconds or minutes, and may be strong enough to make buildings fall down. Earthquakes happen where

there are great cracks in the rocks below ground. The rocks on each side of the crack suddenly slide past each other. This makes the ground shake.

Q: Where is the Grand Canyon?

A: The Grand Canyon is in Arizona in the United States. It is as much as 18 miles wide and 1 mile deep in some places. Furthermore, it is the longest gorge in the world, being more than 200 miles in length. The Grand Canyon was formed by the Colorado River cutting deep in the rock over thousands of years.

Q: What planets are closer to the Sun than the Earth?

A: I am going to talk a little bit about astronomy. In particular, I want to tell you about the two planets that are closer to the Sun than the Earth; Mercury and Venus. Mercury orbits the Sun….that is, completes its circuit around the Sun in 88 days. Venus on the other hand takes longer….it takes 255 days.

Q: Where is the Sahara Desert?

A: Well, the Sahara Desert is located in North Africa and it extends approximately 3,500,000 square miles - just a bit less than the total area of the United States. It is quite big!!

Q: Why count calories?

A: If you are watching your weight, you probably worry about calories….the number of calories you eat, or drink for that matter. Well, one thing you might consider when choosing drinks is that twelve ounces of beer has more calories than twelve ounces of soda. However, I doubt either one will help your diet!!

Q: What do you do if someone gets burned?

A: Well, doctors say if a burn is mild - meaning there is no broken skin and it is not too severe - you should put the burn into ice water - submerge it in ice water. If it is severe you should call a doctor and keep the patient quiet and warm.

Q: How do you take notes when listening to a lecture?

A: When you are taking notes, you do not have time to write down everything the speaker says. You must note as much information as possible in the fewest words. Each person can develop his or her own symbols and abbreviations. The important thing is that you understand them and will be able to read them a day or a week or a year later.

Q: Why is it important to predict content when listening to a lecture?

A: Being able to predict individual words in a lecture is important in that it allows you to feel at ease with *NOT* knowing or hearing every word in a lecture. Being able to predict information is also important because it helps you organize your notes in advance and allows you to listen more efficiently and selectively.

Exercise C: Expressive Use of Classifiers

- Select English texts that are descriptive in nature - layouts of a house, descriptions of types of equipment or machinery and how they operate, geographic / scenic locations, physical appearances of people, animals, buildings, locations, etc.

- Isolate the items that would require the use of a classifier in ASL.

- Make a list and practice describing each of the items on the list.

  Work with the items in isolation for as long as needed, until you feel confident that you can effectively discuss the items by using signs and classifiers. If needed, discuss items on the list with a Deaf mentor or a colleague, asking for suggestions and ideas.

- Once you have identified and practiced how to sign each item on the list, generate the items in context by re-telling the English text in ASL.

  If possible, record yourself signing the re-telling of the text and ask a colleague or Deaf mentor to review the product and give you feedback on the effectiveness of the classifiers.

- Re-do the re-telling of the text on the basis of feedback.

Exercise D: Journal

Maintain a journal of English items that emerge as part of your daily work that you need to express in ASL by way of classifiers. Review your entries with a Deaf mentor or colleague to identify additional ways in which you could express the information.

Resources

<u>Free Online Materials</u>

ASL Storytime from the Department of Sign Language and Interpretation at Gallaudet University

- This series includes three volumes, each containing stories with a broad variety of ASL features.
- Available on YouTube.
  - Volume 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLxddLdxbOw
  - Volume 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAGx5CXgmTU
  - Volume 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xqx4wCZoCMU

  NOTE: These stories are good for practice of many ASL features so use them with other instructional sheets in addition to this one!

TerpTalks from the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC)

- This series includes diverse ASL and English texts available for practice interpreting.
- There is no charge for accessing these materials, although you may be required to register to access.
- Available on NCIEC's website: http://www.interpretereducation.org/tim/terptalks/browse/

Purchasable Materials

The following resources may be available for use from your local interpreter education program or through your public library. If the library does not have them, request that they purchase them for community use.

Interpreter Practice Materials from Sign Media (www.signmedia.com)

- Set of 33 DVDs includes 12 simultaneous texts, 12 consecutive texts, 7 one-to-one situations, 2 small groups, 6 ASL texts and 6 English texts.
- Excellent for individual, study group, or classroom skill development exercises.